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State Senator Tupac A. Hunter

Serving Detroit, Dearborn Heights & Inkster

Legislative Report



MICHIGAN STATE SENATE
TUPAC A. HUNTER
STATE SENATOR • 5TH DISTRICT

Dear Friend,

This fall my colleagues and I voted on the final versions of the 2009-2010 budget bills. Those bills have now been signed into law. Our state and our families are all facing a difficult economy. In spite of these lean times, it is still the state's job to provide vital services to Michigan citizens. Just as you may have had to make sacrifices, the state has also had to trim its budget. Even though we are making do with less money for many programs, there are still services available to you and your family.

Inside this newsletter you will find information on utility plans offered by Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy, programs offered by the State Department of Human Services and resources that will help families who are facing foreclosure. You will also find information on new legislation I have introduced that will help families and build a stronger Michigan.

Please know that the health, safety, and well-being of all my constituents continue to be my first and foremost priority. As always, please feel free to contact my Lansing office toll-free at 1-866-262-7305 if you have any thoughts or questions you want to share.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Very truly yours,

State Senator • Tupac A. Hunter

Talk Time with Tupac

Senator Hunter has scheduled three coffee hours to give constituents an opportunity to personally share their ideas and concerns.

Detroit: Mary's Grill, 20804 Plymouth Road

All coffee hours are held on the 1st Friday of the month from 10-11 AM.

Inkster: McDonald's, 27125 Cherry Hill Road

All coffee hours are held on the 2nd Friday of the month from 10-11 AM.

Dearborn Heights: McDonald's, 6412 North Telegraph Road

All coffee hours are held on the 3rd Friday of the month from 10-11 AM.

You are invited to attend whichever coffee hours work best for your schedule. If you are interested in joining me, please call my office toll-free at 1-866-262-7305 to confirm your attendance. Please be sure to leave a message if you call after hours.

State and Local Agencies Help Families

There are a number of state and local agencies that can help families with their needs ranging from food assistance, to transportation, to home weatherization. Below is a list of some of these agencies and the services they offer.

State Department of Social Services – Wayne County

DHS can help with many needs including medical needs, utility assistance, and food assistance. The Central Office is located at 2929 Russell in Detroit. Phone **313-396-0200**. You can also visit the DHS website at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Department of Human Services – Inkster

The State Department of Human Services branch office is located at 2700 Hamlin. You can reach the office by calling **313-277-4800**.

City of Detroit Department of Human Services

This department offers three divisions to help Detroit residents. The Center Operations Division helps through programs including energy assistance, home weatherization, and transportation. The Child Development Division offers programs including education and early childhood development, and family and community partnerships. The Weatherization Division evaluates single-family and multi-family homes, and helps determine the

most cost-effective way to make homes energy efficient while saving money and protecting the health and safety of residents. This office is located at 5031 Gandy, Detroit, **313-852-5609**. You can also find their website at www.detroitmi.gov: click on residents, then click on Health and Human Services.

City of Detroit Senior Citizens Department

The Senior Citizens Department offers services including homebound senior services, housing, utility assistance, and transportation. The office is located at 18100 Meyers Road, Suite 105 (located in Northwest Activities Center), Detroit, **313-224-5444**. You can find their website at www.detroitmi.gov: click on residents, then click on Health and Human Services.

Department of Human Services MIBridges Website

The Michigan Department of Human Services is focused on ensuring clients receive the benefits for which they are eligible. Through the implementation of the MIBridges program – an online food assistance application and client self-service portal – families who are eligible or already participating in the food assistance program can access their account via the internet. For more information please visit www.michigan.gov/mibridges.



Senator Hunter works at his desk during session.

United Way of Southeastern Michigan

The United Way runs the 211 Help Line which connects people with helpful services just as 911 connects people with emergency services. By dialing 211, people can be referred to agencies that can help with job training, rent, mortgage payments, and the cost of food or prescriptions. 211 is a lifeline for people in difficult situations trying to navigate their way through local and state programs. Phone **2-1-1** or visit their website at www.uwsem.org.

Focus: Hope

Focus: Hope offers job training and education programs through their centers of opportunity. The organization also offers food assistance to needy families. Phone **313-494-5500** or visit their website at www.focushope.edu/default.htm.

Legislation Would Ban Explicit Signs On Buildings

Senator Hunter is the sponsor of Senate Bill 879 which, along with his other bill, Senate Bill 266, will rid our communities of sexually explicit signs and billboards. Senate Bills 266 and 879 would only allow billboards and signs that advertise a sexually-oriented business to list the name and type of business, the location, and the hours of operation. Both bills have been unanimously approved by the Senate.

These signs and billboards are the kind that many see along 8 Mile Road promoting topless bars and other sexually-oriented businesses. These are not the kind of images that most want to see in their community. They send the wrong message to children and to visitors

in our communities. Banning these signs and billboards will ensure that our neighborhoods and communities are clean of any adult-themed material and create a better and safer community in which to raise our children.



In September, the Detroit City Council heard proposals to further regulate strip clubs in Detroit. Senator Hunter's legislation will be another tool to help Detroit regulate these clubs and limit their presence in our communities.

Senate Bill 879 would limit signs on buildings that advertise a sexually-oriented business to using only words and numbers, and would only allow them to list the name and type of business, the location, and the hours of operation. These businesses could use their trademark on a sign only if that trademark has been registered under the federal Lanham Act. The Lanham Act does not allow certain images, including those that are considered immoral, to be trademarked.

Stronger Autism Coverage Bills Will Help Families

Along with Senator Buzz Thomas, have introduced new and stronger autism legislation to require that insurance companies cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorder.

The new Senate bills would require insurance companies to offer coverage for autism spectrum disorder. Except for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) treatments, the bills would not allow limits on the number of visits that could be made to an autism services provider. Coverage would not be subject to dollar limits, co-pays, deductibles, or coinsurance provisions that did not

apply to physical illness in general. Coverage limits for ABA would be subject to a maximum annual benefit of \$50,000.

Nearly one in every 150 children is born with this developmental disorder and nearly 1 in 200 children have a milder form of autism. The treatments for autism spectrum disorder are extremely expensive, costing Michigan families an average of nearly \$30,000 per year. I hope that the Senate and House can work together to give Michigan citizens the same relief from these high costs that families in many other states already have.



Senator Hunter discusses his legislation concerning insurance coverage for autism therapies at a press conference with House Bill sponsors, Rep. Kathy Angerer (D-Dundee) and Rep. Richard Ball (R-Laingsburg).

365 Days of Thanksgiving

For the past seven years, my office has worked to help struggling families in my district. I am pleased to report that we were able to provide Thanksgiving meals to approximately 200 families in the district.

I am grateful for the outpouring of support from many community partners, especially Sisters Acquiring Financial Empowerment (S.A.F.E.). It is my hope that this small token was a blessing to those in need this holiday season.

On behalf of my family and staff, I hope that you and your family had a blessed and happy holiday season.



DTE Energy and Consumers Energy Offer Utility Bill Assistance

With winter just around the corner, it's important that we begin preparing ourselves and our houses for the colder weather. DTE Energy and Consumers Energy offer a number of programs to help customers with their energy bills.

Payment assistance programs offered to customers include: a medical emergencies program to postpone shutoffs in the event of a medical issue; and a shutoff protection plan to spread future bills out over the year, while also including equal monthly payments on an unpaid balance in order to avoid a shutoff.

Some consumers and all senior citizens regardless of their income also qualify for the Winter Protection Plan. This program protects seniors and low-income customers from shutoff between November 1 and March 31. During this period, customers must pay a portion of their estimated annual

bill plus regular payments on any past-due bills. After March 31, the required bill payments will increase to cover winter bills. For more information on any of these programs call Consumers Energy at 800-477-5050, and DTE Energy at 800-477-4747.

Many assistance programs are available by calling 211 at United Way. Weatherization help is available for low-income residents. These programs help with caulking, weather stripping, and insulation. Another program that is available is THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund, which helps people facing a shutoff who have exhausted all federal and state funding programs.

The state offers assistance with energy bills through the State Emergency Relief Program in the Department of Human Services. This program is available to DHS clients and non-DHS clients. For more information call the Energy

Assistance Hotline at 800-292-5650, or visit your local DHS office. The State Department of Social Services for Wayne County is located at 2929 Russell Street in Detroit. You can reach that office by calling 313-396-0200.

Visit these websites to learn more about the help that is available:

DTE Energy: www.dteenergy.com/residentialCustomers/billingPayment/paymentPrograms/payAssistance.html.

Consumers Energy: www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm.

United Way of Southeastern Michigan: www.uwsem.org/.

THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund: www.thawfund.org/how_help/index.html.

State Emergency Relief Energy Assistance Programs: www.michigan.gov/heatingassistance/0,1607,7-215-33211-105989--,00.html.



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Senate Democrats Unveil New Tools to Fight Foreclosure



Senator Hunter presides over the Senate while Senators debate bills during session.

Senate Democrats have unveiled legislation attacking “foreclosure consultant” scams and giving homeowners more transparency in the loan modification process. Despite efforts from both federal and state government agencies, the number of foreclosure filings nationwide hit a record high in the third quarter of 2009, according to a recently issued report. The new bills being introduced will: crack down on “foreclosure consultant” scams by establishing basic qualifications and regulations; require companies to notify homeowners when a lender sells their mortgage to a third party; and require lenders to post their foreclosure and loan modification criteria online.

Michigan has had one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation over the last three years. Though Senate Democrats helped pass a new state law that went into effect in July that freezes foreclosure proceedings for 90 days, there is still much more that needs to be done to help protect homeowners. This

legislation is intended to help homeowners avoid the pitfalls that can lead to home foreclosure altogether, and require lenders and consultants to be completely open with consumers. Over the third quarter of 2009, nearly 1 million homes received a foreclosure letter of some kind according to the RealtyTrac report. That translates to one home out of every 136 in the United States being foreclosed upon, which is 5% higher than the second quarter and a 23% spike over the same third quarter of 2008. Michigan remains in the top ten states in the country for the number of foreclosures. If Michigan homeowners believe they may have uncovered a foreclosure rescue scam, they can contact the Michigan Office of Financial and Insurance Regulation toll-free at (877) 999-6442 or online at www.michigan.gov/ofir.

Wayne County Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program

This program offers help to people no matter what point they are at in the foreclosure process. The program can determine a family’s options, and in some cases can negotiate directly with banks and lenders for the family. Phone 313-833-2948, toll-free 877-693-6199 or www.fightmortgageforeclosure.com/.

The Helping Hand Website

The Helping Hand website, www.michigan.gov/helpinghand, offers information on jobs and

training, unemployment benefits, health care, family support, and housing. The website also allows people to sign up for food assistance and can help people determine if they may be eligible for unemployment benefits or certain types of public assistance such as Medicaid.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

MSHDA offers information for those experiencing financial difficulties or facing foreclosure. The Save the Dream program hotline operated by MSHDA directs homeowners to a homeownership counselor in their county who specializes in foreclosure prevention. The hotline number is 866-946-7432. Homeowners can also locate a MSHDA counselor directly by going to www.mshda.info/counseling_search/. Visit MSHDA’s Save the Dream Website at www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,1607,7-141-45866_47905-177801--,00.html.

The United States Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD offers foreclosure information on its website, http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/avoiding_foreclosure. The site also provides links to federal programs such as Hope for Homeowners <http://www.hud.gov/hopeforhomeowners/index.cfm>, and the Making Home Affordable program www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/.